

1st Sunday Advent (B)

- From your own experiences of things like waiting for exam results, the birth of a child, the dying of someone you love, isn't it extremely rare for time to pass in the measured way that our clocks & watches suggest?
- Isn't time a very mysterious, elastic dimension in which we live?
- It can dictate what we do in the meantime.
- Depending on how you look at it, this last year of the Pandemic has for some, progressed painfully slowly, for others, it has passed by all too swiftly with nothing much happening.
- Often, the anticipation of a *future* event affects our sense of *present* time making time seem to go so slowly or just too fast.
- Sometimes that future event never materializes, which can leave us feeling somewhat foolish, sometimes disappointed, sometimes even relieved.
- But what if we knew with certainty that some major life determining event would most definitely occur, even in the remote future?
- Wouldn't that create within us a certain attitude, a certain way of life, in anticipation?
- Perhaps the time of preparation this Advent is also a call to stay awake & stay alert in faith.
- One of the great challenges to faith today is the complacency that has taken hold of many in our society.
- When life is comfortable, the perceived need for faith seems to diminish.
- Many people in our society cannot see the value of religious belief or religious practice; in a world of instant communication & instant 'satisfaction', the reflective & slow work of faith that requires patience & an effort to consider what is going on around me & discern how I need to respond, can seem too much effort for some people.
- The gospel call to stay awake in preparation for the coming of the Lord is a call to continue the work of bringing about the Kingdom of God.
- Over the last three weeks, the gospel passages from Matthew were reminders about continuing to prepare for the coming of the Kingdom.
- This week, with the beginning of Advent, it is the gospel of Mark that also reminds us that we cannot take the Kingdom for granted & must remain vigilant in working to realise the Kingdom.
- This vigilance needs to be applied to nurturing our own faith life as well as making a difference in the lives of those around us & the needy in society.
- Rather than 'Stay awake!' maybe some of us need to be told, 'Wake up!'
- It is never too late to pay closer attention to faith & perhaps this Advent is an ideal time to do that; that is what this Gospel story is really about.
- Jesus portrays himself as the Master who goes away on a journey.
- It is certain that he will return, even if no-one in his household knows exactly when, & so the workers need to patiently go about their tasks

without knowing when they can be held accountable for how they've lived & what they've done during that waiting time.

- Jesus of Nazareth, whose birth we will celebrate in four weeks' time, who has passed through the gateway of death, resurrection & ascension, that Jesus of Nazareth will definitely return & be revealed clearly to be the Lord of all history, of all time.
- What do we do in anticipation? How do we spend our time?
- Jesus indicates that we have a choice.
- We can close our eyes & go to sleep & enter into the world of dreams where we create our own fantasy futures, *or* we are to be awake & alert to do what Jesus wants us to do in anticipation of his return.
- As the Gospel story tells us: 'He left his servants in charge, giving to each his work.' We are his servants; he has left you & me – his servants – to do a particular work, to fulfil a particular role in this phase of human history.
- Each of us has a unique task, an irreplaceable role in the household of humanity; we're told to be alert, be on the watch for the promptings of the Holy Spirit Who will tell you with a deep sense of certainty what that role is. Many of you will have already discovered it.
- For most, it will be when you love someone dearly, real love, the willingness-to-die-for-the-other love of a spouse or partner or child.
- For others, it will come in work or some expertise when you know that this task was for you to do - no-one else could do it.
- For others, it can come in a moment of sporting endeavour or artistic exhilaration when body, mind & spirit seem to be at an harmonious peak.
- Or it can come when one takes a stand for something believed to be right, persevering against the odds for the sake of justice.
- At that moment, you know why you were 'put on the planet' at this time & no other – why you were loved into existence for 'now' rather than a hundred years previously or in the future.
- We are entrusted with a responsibility whereby the master in the Mark's story, who is God, entrusts the world to our good care.
- Whether the world will become a hell or paradise depends on our decisions & the dream of a new earth begins with us, here & now in the positions of management for which we have responsibility – in the ways we are respectful of the world's resources; in the ways we deal with people; in the ways we love.
- We must be true to that task or role given to us by God.
- Then, when the end of history does come, yours & that of all created order, you & he will find that you had anticipated His coming with the timely living of every moment of your existence - Then you will hear the wonderful words: *'Come, good & faithful servant, come, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you since the foundation of the world.'*